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**Living with crime:
Spaces of risk for homeless young people**

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ABSTRACT

This paper reports on a study of victimization, offending and fear among homeless young people in Newcastle upon Tyne, England, which employed a participatory methodology. These young people live in marginal and often invisible spaces, yet are subject to a high degree of regulation which structures their experiences of risk. Their accounts demonstrate that an ‘either/or’ distinction which often structures understanding of offenders and victims, feared and fearful, and safe and dangerous spaces has led to their experiences being poorly represented. Homeless young people are often multiply positioned in relation to crime, an understanding which challenges the current political climate in Britain.

KEY WORDS

crime; homelessness; young people; participatory research; Newcastle upon Tyne, England

INTRODUCTION

Young people and crime

Except in conjunction with the ideology of childhood ‘innocence’ – itself increasingly shaken by the demonization of ever younger age groups – the predominant categorizations of youth do not sit easily within a ‘victim’ discourse.

(Brown, 1998, 116-7)

Much evidence has suggested that those most likely to be victimised by crime in Britain are the most marginalized social groups living in the poorest areas (Simmons 2002). Vulnerability to crime and to the negative effects of fear of crime is exacerbated by social, economic and political exclusion (Crawford et al, 1990; Pain and Shirlow, 2003). However, young people have not been prominent as victims of crime and fear, even within critical criminological and geographical literatures until recently. This is beginning to change as a growing number of studies have identified that children and teenagers are disproportionately likely to be victims of crime, and that fear of crime can have more damaging effects on their lives than on adults’ (e.g. Anderson et al, 1994; Aye-Maung, 1995; Brown, 1995; Hartless et al, 1995; Loader et al, 1998; Morgan and Zedner, 1992). Yet in mainstream public and policy discourses, young people are still primarily constructed as offenders, and their victimization and fear are only mentioned and addressed in crime prevention policy in a very piecemeal way (Pain 2003).

For example, the emphasis of two major recent pieces of legislation on crime in Britain, the, 1998 Crime and Disorder Act and the, 1999 Criminal Justice and Young People Act, was on youth offending, while the first round of crime audits and strategies, now the lynchpin of local community safety policy-making, have been criticised for failing to address the needs of young people as victims. Very few audits contain information on young people's victimization, there has been little meaningful consultation with young people, and few strategies have been devised to counter their victimization. Indeed, in line with the broader political climate, 'many of the strategies combine (or equate) issues relating to the safety of young people with the problem of reducing juvenile crime' (Mason, 2000).

Rather than exploring further this discrepancy, which has been detailed elsewhere (Brown, 1998; Muncie, 2003), this paper seeks to dismantle some of the ways in which certain young people are commonly categorised in relation to crime, and show that young people are multiply positioned. In so doing it highlights the spatialities of their identities as homeless young people and the types of crime which they suffer. Their treatment epitomises the general tendency for dualisms and binaries to be constructed around victimization and fear (see Pain, 2001) - that certain types of people commit crime, and others are victims of it; that certain people fear and others provoke fear; that certain places and spaces are dangerous and others are safe. As Walklate (1989) has argued, this leads to a set of inaccurate stereotypes around social difference and crime. In reality, much crime takes place within the local areas, local communities and family homes of victims and offenders, and often those most likely to offend and those most likely to be victims share social and economic backgrounds.

In a review of historical and contemporary processes of ‘othering’ of children by adults in British society, Valentine (1996) identifies re-emerging discourses of children either as ‘angels’ in need of protection (especially our children), or ‘demons’ in need of control (other people’s children). Whether treated as victims or offenders, children are subject to increasing spatial regulation and constraint, as evidenced by recent British policy-making around crime. However, recent community ethnographies have suggested that such stereotypes are more readily identified in the media and the policy sphere than in the views of either older or younger people (Brown, 1995; Loader et al, 1998). As McKendrick (1997) suggests in his ethnography of children’s street life, the categorisation of children as victims (ours) or offenders (theirs) rarely fits with the complex local relations they are situated in. Instead, children and young people have multifarious experiences of crime. The forms and sites of crime they experience are diverse and porous, and often offending and victimization are not exclusive categories. Evidence suggests that certain groups of young people experience particularly high levels of both victimization and offending (Carlen 1996; MacDonald 1997; Webster 2003).

Putting marginalised groups at the centre

In order to develop debates around risk and young people, the particular and very diverse experiences of different groups must be recognised. Those who have been labelled ‘hard to reach’¹ or ‘excluded’ – for example those who are homeless, not attending school for a variety of reasons, some of those who are disabled or from black/minority groups - have a key position in these debates. There are grounds on which to suspect that victimization and the impacts of crime for these young people are significantly higher than average, although they tend to be subject to

criminalization and associated with high rates of offending too (MacDonald, 1997). However, evidence about their experiences of victimization is sparse, due to the failure of traditional methods of research and consultation, and the lack of political will to reach them.

The research reported here focused on two examples of 'hard to reach' groups; homeless young people (the focus of this paper) and school-excluded young people. They were selected for the study as they are poorly represented in research, consultation or as partners in policy-making; in other words they epitomise the problematic ways that crime and youth are commonly constructed. Both the methodology adopted, and the conceptual approach to young people as victims of crime, involved a commitment to giving credence and centrality to young people's experiences and accounts, and trying to work from 'their' issues and understandings rather than 'our' existing knowledge and categories.

The spaces of youth homelessness and the geographies of risk

For the purposes of this research, 'homeless' refers to people in housing difficulty (e.g. living with friends, in bed and breakfast, board and lodging or a hostel that does not offer a permanent home) and those who are roofless (e.g. rough sleepers and street homeless). Around 100,000 children experienced homelessness in Britain in 2002 (Shelter 2003), and over 250,000 people aged 17-25 live in temporary accommodation in (Wardhaugh, 2000). In Britain, the main factor leading to youth homelessness is family conflict, which may result in young people choosing or being forced to leave the parental home (Carlen, 1996; Hutson and Liddiard, 1994). This has been exacerbated since the 1980s by a number of structural, economic and policy

factors, including high youth unemployment, a reduction in state benefits (especially for 16-18 year olds, but also for 18-25 year olds), and a lack of easily accessible cheap accommodation owing to the lack of new build, the sale of council stock, and low levels of cheap privately rented or Housing Association accommodation (Carlen, 1996; Hutson and Liddiard, 1994). Youth homelessness is a transient rather than fixed grouping, which young people move into and out of at different times, and includes people in a diverse range of situations (Hutson and Liddiard, 1994). In this sense, as for many other excluded groups, young homeless people are only a social group in so far as they share housing circumstances at a point in time; they do not necessarily share a sense of identity or experience. Nonetheless, they are frequently labelled by others in certain ways.

To understand the risks facing homeless young people, it is helpful to consider the nature of the spaces in which they live their everyday lives. A small but influential body of research on homelessness in critical geography has mapped the lives of homeless people and pointed to the spatialities of homelessness. Below, we discuss four themes in this literature, and consider their implications in shaping particular risks for homeless young people.

First, geographers have drawn out some of the ways in which representations of homelessness are spatialized, for example as being a problem only in certain places, notably the streets of urban areas (Cloke et al 2000b). The homeless young people in our research largely inhabited marginal and invisible spaces, to the extent that the city of Newcastle has some pride in having a 'limited' youth homelessness problem. In fact there is a problem – our research engaged with 118 homeless young people, who

we believe to be a small minority of the total at any one time. But homeless young people are less visible than older people as they are less likely to be living on the streets, instead choosing temporary accommodation where it is available in the form of hostels, foyers, squatting, or staying with friends. Equally, the identities of certain groups of homeless people are associated with and created through certain spaces. This spatialization may reinforce the definition of some as delinquent and disorderly (Ruddick 1996), and may shape risks of victimization. Rowe and Wolch (1990) and Dear and Wolch (1987) have examined the spatial experiences of homeless women and people with mental and physical disabilities, identifying specific risks of victimization in the process. The work of Carlen (1996), Ruddick (1996) and Wardhaugh (2000) has shown how the general labelling of young people in public spaces as delinquent creates particular problems for homeless young people who often have no choice but to live large parts of their lives in public view. The common image of homeless young people's victimization is also firmly located on the streets, where they are – paradoxically - labelled as at risk from violence, prostitution, and drug and alcohol abuse (Hutson and Liddiard, 1996). Our research challenges this image, as we go on to discuss.

Secondly, and closely connected to this first theme, constructions of particular places affect the nature and visibility of homeless 'problems' which exist there, so that for Cloke et al (2000b) the dominant constructions of English rurality as an affluent, problem-free environment work to conceal and marginalize homeless people in the countryside. For the young people in Ruddick's research (1996), Hollywood had an appeal as a symbolic space, leading to particular subcultures among homeless people. Geographers have pointed too to the varying and unequal spatial location and

practices of support services, which may marginalize homeless people or effectively redistribute homelessness (Cloke et al 2000b; Takahashi 1996 ???ref).

Thirdly, Ruddick's work in particular has focused on constructions of public and private spheres – many homeless people live, literally, on the boundaries between them. These constructions are implicit in how homeless people are perceived and treated, and how they manage their lives. For example, as Ruddick (1996) shows, although family life is used as a metaphor in many attempts to help or control homeless young people, family life has itself created homelessness for many (see also Hutson and Liddiard 1994). Building on these arguments, Aitken (1998) suggests that while the social position of youth seems defined only in light of the family, commodified public space is increasingly important in marginalising homeless young people in urban centres. Turning to the geographies of crime for those who are homeless, this tension between public and private is central. The usual spatial distinctions applied to safety and victimization, such as public/private, personal/communal, own space/others' space, are less likely to apply to homeless young people's lives. Most of the spaces they inhabit are shared with others, and so for many there is little privacy to retreat to. This has consequences both for the risk of crime and the impacts which victimization and offending have. A lack of feeling of belonging to any particular place characterised the sample (although some had strong connections to communities of other young people in similar situations). Their lack of private or personal space also compounds the greater surveillance and regulation to which they are subject in the public sphere. However, this is not to say that the private sphere is viewed as safe in comparison to public space, or the solution to young people's problems, as we go on to demonstrate.

Fourthly, as Ruddick's work on homeless young people in Los Angeles ably highlights, the spaces of the 'homeless' are embroiled in power relations and contested. Homeless young people in many western countries have been subject to increasing regulation, surveillance, criminalization and punishment since the 1980s (Carlen, 1996). They are widely viewed by the state as a threat to social order who commit crime and create disorder and discomfort among others. Their presence on the streets is sometimes the subject of fear among more 'legitimate' users of public space (Pain and Townshend, 2002). In Britain, some of the activities in which some homeless young people engage, such as begging and squatting, have become criminalized, while drug use is also an unwelcome focus of the greater and more hostile attention from the police which homeless young people experience. Here, this process of criminalization has a long history, but the current British government has performed a policy U-turn and reinforced intolerance by criminalizing beggars and visible young homeless people in public spaces (Wardhaugh, 2000). However, homeless people may engage in spatial struggles: in Ruddick's work, young people made 'tactical use' of space to resist preconceptions about their identities. In order to uncover the agency of homeless people she advocates sensitive research methods which are most likely to identify complex spatialities, and is echoed in much of the critical literature on homelessness (Carlen, 1996; Cloke et al, 2000a; Wardhaugh, 2000; Wright, 1992). Nonetheless relatively little research has sought to give homeless people some influence, as well as a voice, in the research process.

The main questions we address here are as follows. How does the status engendered by being young and homeless affect the risks of victimization and offending, and

labelling and treatment by others? Which places are most risky for homeless young people? What implications does this have for the conceptualisation of young people and crime?

METHODOLOGY

The research reported here was funded by the British Home Office. One of its aims was to apply and develop a participatory methodology for research and consultation with 'hard to reach' groups which might engage and empower young people and effect change with them. A full description of the project is given in Pain et al (2001), while a critical reflection on the methodology can be found in Pain and Francis (2003). For the part of the project which focused on homeless young people, participatory appraisal (PA) was chosen because of its potential to access and engage 'hard to reach' groups and include them in data collection, analysis and follow-up action. PA is becoming more popular used in Britain, and is closely related to participatory rural appraisal, participatory urban appraisal and participatory learning and action, all more widely used in developing countries (Chambers, 1997, 1999). PA usually uses participatory diagramming techniques to generate data (see Kesby 2000), and seeks to conduct action research which prioritises the views of local people as experts and engages them in solutions.

Table I shows that 118 young homeless people, ranging in age from 13-25, and over 35 people who work with them (mostly youth workers) took part in the research in Newcastle upon Tyne. Participants were accessed through a range of hostels and services such as lunch clubs and drop-in advice centres in the city, as well as street locations. This meant, for the most part, that the research took place at sites where

young people gather informally and which were familiar to them. Sessions were undertaken in small peer groups, in most cases where participants knew each other and were comfortable with each other. Project workers were discouraged from being present, so that young people were more likely to talk openly.

(TABLE I ABOUT HERE)

A range of methods was used, including interviews and observation, but the central plank consisted of participatory diagramming. The research was designed and employed in order to be as emergent as possible. The facilitator began by suggesting broad issues and particular tools, and worked with the group to raise issues, detail them and discuss solutions. However, groups could choose which issues to focus upon and which tools to use, and were encouraged to lead and sometimes change altogether the direction of the session. A sequence of tools was designed for the project, including brainstorming on crime, ranking exercises to identify the most serious crimes, cause/effect diagrams for victimization, and spider diagrams to identify solutions, blockages and opportunities (see Figure 1). Members of some groups drew timelines showing how crime had affected their lives, but these were most often used in conjunction with individual interviews (see Figure 2). All visual exercises were used as a basis for further discussion, which was recorded by taking notes at the time and later. Individual interviews were also carried out with many of the young people after group sessions (see Case Studies 1 and 2). Workers accessed at the same sites took part in separate groupwork and interviews.

Data analysis was iterative and took place at four stages. First, in preparation for verification, the field researcher who had facilitated most of the groupwork and interviews drew out key findings which she felt represented the overall data which young people had produced. Secondly, a data verification event was held at a venue in the city centre which was well known to homeless young people and publicised in advance. Young people and workers were asked to look at preliminary findings, and comment on whether they agreed with them or wanted to add, challenge or prioritise any of them. Thirdly, in light of verification, the field researcher modified and expanded upon her analysis, and subsequent reports were circulated to the research participants and to a wide range of relevant agencies in the city. Their responses then informed the final project report. Finally, the project managers subjected the data to content analysis in light of the initial research questions, themes in the relevant academic literatures, and the current policy context.

Our discussion of the findings below reflects our own interpretations, though we use some phrases from young people in their own words. Because sessions were not tape recorded, these phrases are brief rather than long quotes. The case studies we have selected to illustrate particular points in our discussion below have also been written in researchers' words.

HOMELESS YOUNG PEOPLE AND THE RISK OF CRIME

Our discussion of findings begins by highlighting that the most violent spaces are often those which are ostensibly 'safe' and serve a protective function for young people. We go on to discuss the relationships between homelessness, offending and

victimization. We suggest that there is often no clear distinction between offending (being a risk) and victimization (being at risk), as both are connected over many individuals' lifecourses, and both create and exacerbate youth homelessness in different ways, in different places, and at different times.

Victimization

Homeless young people are more at risk from crime victimization, before and while they are homeless, and also more likely to suffer multiple and repeat victimization (MacDonald, 1997; Wardhaugh, 2000). Our research confirms that because of their age and housing status, young homeless people are especially vulnerable to crime and its effects. Homelessness is a dimension of risk additional to those of gender, race, sexual orientation, age and able-bodiedness; one which has a compounding effect on the other inequalities which excluded groups experience. It emerged that the greatest risk for homeless young people is not the street, but the homes they have left behind, the relationships young women have with men, and young people's contact with the police. Thus the tensions between the public and private sphere identified by Ruddick (1996) and Aitken (1998) follow through to create paradoxes of risk for homeless young people. While they are sometimes viewed as a threat to 'family life', often it is family life which has threatened their safety and well-being.

Experiences of sexual abuse in the home were common among the young women in our study, and a major reason for becoming homeless (Hutson and Liddiard, 1994; Stein et al, 1994). In a previous study, 40% of young homeless women had become homeless because of sexual abuse (Hendessi, 1992). A number of young men had also suffered physical abuse at the hands of parents or step-parents. For example, one

young man's step-father beat him up and kicked him out of home for making too much noise. Another told his mother he had had under-age gay sex, and she told his father who beat him up and threw him out. One young man's step-mother beat him and burned him with an iron, forcing him to leave. Many young people also talked about witnessing domestic violence and conflict between their parents in the home as a reason for running away – this 'secondary victimization' is a key factor in homelessness. A growing body of literature is documenting the devastating effects which domestic violence between parents can have on children's lives (Hester et al, 1998).

Gender is central to these experiences. An Australian review suggests that young homeless men are more likely to be physically assaulted, and young homeless women more likely to be sexually assaulted, than their peers (National Crime Prevention, 1999). Our study suggests that young women are also more likely to suffer violence from partners when homeless than men. In this context, domestic violence is a misnomer, as homeless young people have very little private or personal 'homespace'. It is, however, a serious and largely invisible issue. The invisibility and marginality of the spaces in which it occurs, and the status of those it affects, underlies the lack of policy attention it has received. Homeless young women can be particularly dependent on their partners for financial and practical support, and such dependence is linked to the likelihood of abuse and the difficulty of escaping from it (Dobash and Dobash, 1992). Domestic violence can also lead to homelessness (see Case Study 1). Another young woman had been kicked in her stomach by her boyfriend which caused her to miscarry her baby. She then moved back with her parents who threw her out soon after, feeling that the boyfriend had been a bad influence on her.

(CASE STUDY 1 ABOUT HERE)

On the streets or in temporary accommodation, young people are more at risk from victimization than their peers – studies have shown higher risks of robbery, assault and sexual violence (Carlen, 1996; Wardhaugh, 2000; Whitbeck and Hoyt, 1999). Accounts of street crime and physical assault were reported by homeless young people in our study, though as they sometimes knew their assailants, some incidents were difficult to distinguish from the bullying, violence and theft from acquaintances, partners and ex-partners which young people in the general population are more at risk from. The fact that most young homeless people in Newcastle do not live on the street itself may underlie the apparently lower levels of ‘public’ space victimization from strangers in comparison with other studies.

An especially prominent type of victimization, however, was harassment and violence from the police. Because of the way homeless young people are commonly labelled as offenders, and the routine regulation of their presence and behaviour, the supposedly safe spaces of law and order offer them little protection. Several personal experiences of serious violence from the police were reported in the study. One young man reported that he had been held by the throat. Another reported he had been “*jumped on*” by police and beaten up, after which they arrested him and took him to hospital. In their statement, the police officers say that they picked him up in this state. One young man was locked up overnight because the police said they were “*bored*”. On another occasion, the police set their dog on the same young man even though he had his hands up. The dog attacked a police officer, the young man laughed, and he was

beaten up. Another young man was stopped by police who asked if he had been drinking. They bashed his head off their car bonnet and then arrested him for criminal damage. There were also accounts from those who had witnessed violent incidents, or who knew of similar things which had happened to friends.

Many young people, especially young men, reported being stopped and searched frequently. They suggested that once you get a bad name, the police stop you “*all the time*”. One young man complained that the police swear at you but prosecute you if you swear at them. One young woman reported being “*treated like shit*” when she was arrested for shoplifting, because she was young, homeless and had a drug problem. Several young people described police overreaction, for example barging aggressively into hostels, and sending four or six officers to arrest one person. Many young people felt that some police officers thought they could get away with harassment and violence, as young people were unlikely to make a complaint, particularly as they were homeless. They suggested that the police make judgements about them depending on their accommodation, that young people are stigmatised for being in a hostel, and that the police have no understanding of how they got there.

The majority of other encounters young people had had with the police were also negative. In particular, they discussed the lack of sympathy received when reporting crime to the police (see Case Study 1). Such complaints are not necessarily specific to this group. They must be viewed in light of homelessness, however, in that young people perceive their housing status to be a reason why the police are especially reluctant to help, and also in that a lack of support from the police tends to reinforce, or in some cases actually create, the housing difficulties they experience. Domestic

violence, discussed earlier, is one example of this. In expectation of this treatment, many young homeless people do not report crime at all, feeling that they are perceived by the police, amongst others, as causing crime, inventing crime and sometimes deserving crime. Yet when generating solutions to the problems they experienced, several groups suggested that the police are sometimes in an ideal position to help homeless young people, often being the first or only contact with statutory services that they have, but that they fail to help due to a lack of understanding of homelessness, and a tendency to label all young homeless people as offenders.

Most of the victimization of young homeless people is never counted in crime surveys or police statistics. There is a hidden figure of victimization experienced by young homeless people, which as under-reported crime shares some of the characteristics of racist or domestic violence, and may even exceed both as a proportion of the affected population. In this context, Wardhaugh (2000) refers to young homeless people as ‘invisible victims’ and ‘shadow victims’. They occupy marginal spaces, which are subject to surveillance of their offending behaviour, but which are rarely viewed as arenas in which crime prevention should focus on homeless people as victims.

Offending

Many of the young people in our study had been picked up by the police for behaviours which, if they took place elsewhere, would not be considered criminal, for example drinking or urinating in the street. Alternative (but in the eyes of some young people, valid) means of acquiring money and shelter such as begging and squatting are also criminalized as we discussed earlier. Some young people discussed more

serious offences such as burglary. There were often direct relationships between offending and homelessness – for example, for some, offending or drug-taking had led to being thrown out of home by families or landlords (see Case Study 2). Young men were particularly likely to report being thrown out of home for committing crime. Young people talked about it being more difficult to find accommodation once you have a criminal record. Those with no address are less likely to be offered bail, and more likely to be remanded in custody and to lose their existing accommodation. Many of the hostels in Newcastle have rules about drugs and crime which lead to some young people being excluded or banned.

(CASE STUDY 2 ABOUT HERE)

For some young people, once they were homeless offending became established behaviour to help make ends meet. It was widely felt that state benefits were not enough to live on, especially for young people aged 18-25, who receive less than people over 25, and those aged 16-18 who receive nothing. Many felt that *“if you have financial difficulty and you are finding it hard to cope then you will turn to crime”*. Many also felt that there are *“no jobs for most people”*, and that the unemployment office *“don’t even bother asking you if you’re looking for work now – it’s like a joke”*. The small body of work on homelessness and crime in the critical social science tradition tends to represent their offending as ‘survival crime’ (offending out of necessity in order to survive the situation of being homeless), which empirical studies show is common (Carlen, 1996; Hutson and Liddard, 1994). In Carlen’s (1996) study of homeless young people, 83% reported lawbreaking, with

begging the most common offence. Hutson and Liddiard (1994) suggest that only a small minority turn to prostitution, despite common perceptions.

For Carlen (1996), survival crime is a necessary part of the ‘reordering of political, moral and economic possibilities’ that is forced by being homeless. It is not that young homeless people have different moral values to the rest of society, rather that offending can be understood by their exclusion from citizenship. When discussing offending, many young people in our research stressed this point; *“I wasn’t born wanting to be a criminal”*; *“a life of crime may be wrong but may be necessary”*. However, while survival crime holds true for many young offenders in our study from their own accounts, many had offended before becoming homeless, and some talked about the enjoyment associated with offending – *“feeling good doing crime”*, doing it *“to be cool”* or *“for a buzz”*. There is a general tendency to view offenders as victims of poverty, and this is born out in many cases, but young people themselves sometimes contest this notion. Many also identified drugs and alcohol, family problems or *“the way you’re being brought up”* as something that contributed to offending (see Case Study 2), while some of those who had experienced extreme violence within the home felt that this increased their own levels of aggression. Others said that in many of the areas that they lived in, *“everyone’s doing it”* and this made them more likely to offend. Like other offenders, those who are homeless commit crimes for different reasons, though necessity is the main one.

Relationships between victimization and offending

From homeless young people’s accounts of victimization and offending it is clear that they are not necessarily separable, nor perceived as such. Individuals may commit

offences and be victimised themselves at different times (or at the same time), and these experiences are often related, both to each other and to the state of being homeless. Many offenders in our study were victims at previous times, while some of those victimised in childhood went on to offend. Some offenders can be viewed as victims of the welfare or social services system (for example, several talked about coming out of care with little or no support), or of poverty. Often, both victimization and offending are involved in a spiral of interrelated circumstances which leads to and exacerbates homelessness. For example, the young woman and young man described in Case Studies 1 and 2 had each committed crime and been victims of it (although the emphasis differs for each, a gendered pattern which was largely representative of young men and women in the research). Both also describe incidents where they might simultaneously be viewed as victim and perpetrator – the young woman’s assault on a man who spiked her drink; the relationship between family conflict and drug use for the young man.

While this observation fits with current understanding of youth and crime (in the general population, those young people who are most likely to offend are also most likely to be victims of crime), it contrasts greatly with popular images of homeless young people. Hutson and Liddiard (1994) discuss some of these common images – of older homeless teenagers (especially males) as predatory muggers, while younger homeless teenagers (males and females) are viewed as highly vulnerable to abuse and prostitution. The discrete categorisation of ‘victim’ and ‘offender’ runs through many academic and professional discourses and policy agendas too. Yet:

Cases such as these challenge criminological theory to conceptualise some individuals as being simultaneously victim and offender...only then might they be understood, not as angels nor as devils, but as a complex and heterogeneous group of people.

(Wardhaugh, 2000, 99)

and:

There is a clear need for organizations to recognise that young people can be both the victim and the perpetrator, and to provide services which can respond to this complexity.

(National Crime Prevention, 1999)

DISCUSSION

The young people who took part in this study confirmed that being young and homeless means being labelled in a particular way, largely as a threat to society, and that their behaviour and lifestyles are criminalized in a number of ways. Most of their offending was petty crime or 'lifestyle' crime such as begging or drug use. Experiences of victimization were more widespread. The greatest risks for homeless young people are not on the street, but in the ostensibly safe spaces where control is exercised over them, and it is widely presumed that this is appropriate and serves a protective function - the homes they have left behind, young women's relationships with men, and in young people's contact with the police.

Our discussion has identified some of the relationships between homelessness and crime, but does not do justice to or come close to describing the enormous complexity of each and every case. In the ways that young people themselves discuss offending (being a risk) and victimization (being at risk), it is clear that there is no absolute distinction between the two. This is especially true for homeless young people, who have little personal or private space and spend large amounts of time in ‘public’ spaces, yet are subject to surveillance, regulation and harassment there. However, it also has broader lessons for analysis of the relationships to crime of other groups of young people. The binaries which run through public, policy and popular discourses, and which are also found in much academic work, need to be dismantled on the basis of people’s own accounts of their experiences of crime. Victims are at times offenders, and the ‘feared’ in this case may be more fearful still. Further, the labels ‘victim’ and ‘offender’ used in this paper are our labels. The young people in the research were often resistant to applying these terms to their own experiences. Likewise, forms and sites of crime against young people are diverse and co-exist. Similar incidents may occur in different spaces (such as violence in the home, other people’s houses, hostels and street settings), and these spaces themselves are porous and may have multiple meanings, so that there is no simple distinction between public and private space, or ‘safe’ and ‘unsafe’ places or people. For example, homelessness itself is widely considered to be a marginal and risky space, but for some young people it is a considerably safer choice than remaining at home.

While criminal justice, policing, housing and other welfare policies fail to address their victimization, young people themselves are active in their own situations, continually making decisions, taking action, and in most cases moving on. However,

their resistance continues to be constrained by the same agencies (Carlen, 1996; Ruddick, 1996). This is a particular problem for homeless young victims, but also applies to young people more generally. There are a number of reasons why growing awareness of the extent of victimization against children and young people has not translated into action. There are some signs that the growing mismatch between research on young people as victims of crime on the one hand, and local and national policy agendas on the other, may be the result of a timelag between the development of evidence and widespread action. Certainly young people's victimization is becoming more widely discussed, although at this point in time talk is far more widespread than action. However, the main reason for the lack of action is that youth tends to be criminalized in public policy and primarily associated with offending, reflecting the broader positioning of youth by society and the state as feared, out of control, and in need of regulation (Brown, 1998; Collins and Kearns, 2001; Muncie, 1999).

We would argue that new approaches, new research methods, new accounts and new policies are required which recognise and address the realities of young people's experiences of crime as they choose to tell them. Participatory methods of research and consultation have proven invaluable for researchers, policy makers and young people's organisations, in engaging groups of young people whose voices are often not heard. Ideally participation should go beyond the use of certain techniques and involve commitment to a collaborative role in research and policy development. In Britain, continued reliance of crime prevention policy on traditional sources of data and a lack of consultation with young people (particularly 'hard to reach' groups) by local authorities and police forces reinforces the exclusion from policy making of

their experiences as victims. In the research we have discussed here, young people made many realisable suggestions for strategies which they felt would improve life for others in their situation, such as one-stop service points for homeless young people so that they could access temporary accommodation, welfare benefits and training as soon as they came onto the streets; and training for police officers about the needs and difficulties faced by young homeless people (see Pain et al 2001). However we have experienced many difficulties getting the findings produced by homeless young people onto local agendas and, in some cases, taken seriously at all (for discussion see Pain 2003); young people's potential as expert evaluators of these issues is barely recognised in current structures of policy-making. Critical geographers have continuing contributions to make to understanding the ways that young people's unsafety is constructed in private and public spheres, and in conducting research which listens to their accounts of the risks they face to actively challenge the exclusion they experience elsewhere.

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NOTES

¹ 'Hard to reach' is a term used in Britain to describe groups who have traditionally been neglected by policy-makers and researchers.

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TABLE I

Summary of participants in the research with homeless young people

Research with homeless young people			Verification with homeless young people			Total number of homeless young people	Number of workers
All	Male	Female	All	Male	Female		
110	75	35	8	2	6	118	35+

CASE STUDY 1

Female aged 21

She got caught shoplifting when she was 13. She said it was so scary, and so embarrassing, that she never wanted anything to do with crime again. When she was 16 she was raped. The police didn't believe her, although she knew the guy who did it. The guy raped her again at a later stage, and this time the police did believe her. When she was a bit older, someone spiked her drink with ecstasy in a club. Then her boyfriend's mate called her a slag, and she says that because she was having a bad trip, she hit him with a bottle. She was arrested. Her friend tried to tell the police about the drink being spiked but they didn't believe her. Because she was of no fixed abode she was sent to a women's prison for four months. Eventually her aunt said she could live with her. She said prison was very scary.

After her parents died she was living with a man who beat her so badly that she was in a coma for three days. The police asked her what happened, and he was in the room mouthing at her "say you were jumped". She feels that the police should have pushed her for a statement, without him stood there. The third time she was in hospital, she told the police that he had beaten her, and that she needed help to get away from him. They took her statement, arrested him, and moved her down to Newcastle. They asked her why she hadn't told them all this before.

She met another man who was also very violent towards her, although he was careful not to bruise her face. When she reported it, the police said that she was making it up to get rid of the bloke. The fourth time it happened the police took a statement. The

boyfriend is still phoning her, and stalking her. She has two children by him, and social services put them into foster care for their protection. She says that she won't get them back until she gets a flat, and she doesn't feel ready to leave the hostel yet. She says she takes each day as it comes, and some days are good days and some days are bad days. She has a new boyfriend now who is very loving and kind, and would never hurt her. She says she has never been referred to Victim Support, or any similar service.

CASE STUDY 2

Male aged 20

His family name was known to police, and he says that judgments were made about him based on that name. His father left when he was aged two. Aged nine he had his first cigarette, at thirteen he tried cannabis, and by fourteen or fifteen he was taking cocaine, ecstasy, cannabis and Valium. He had an argument with his Ma and smashed the door in. He was charged with criminal damage and given a two year probation order. He went to live in a hostel, where he assaulted a worker and a resident while on Valium. He decided to go to the doctor, but was offered Prozac which he didn't want – he wanted help. His mate locked him in a bedroom with the doors and windows locked, and brought him meals and dope. He said this was the best thing he could have done, but at the time he was trying to knock the door down.

He moved back home. A week later his cousin died, and his Ma's boyfriend found him crying and hit him, so he hit back. This resulted in him being kicked out of the house again. He lived with someone who injected, and this got too much for him, especially when the guy was stealing money from him. He stayed in a couple of different hostels. He met someone who tried to stop him drinking. This mate is now using heroin, and he feels that he can't help him. He then moved back home to his Ma (the boyfriend had gone). He wanted to sort his head out before there was too much police involvement in his life, in case this stopped him getting a job. Then he moved in with friends. In the future, he would like to get a job, a nice lass and maybe have some kids.

Figure 1 [image DSC00001 in separate file]

Caption: Group brainstorm on policing

Figure 2 [image DSC00019 in separate file]

Caption: Timeline drawn by young woman